

Henry Baldwin to Andrew Jackson, October 18, 1831, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

HENRY BALDWIN¹ TO JACKSON.

¹ Since Jan. 6, 1830, an associate justice of the Supreme Court.

Philadelphia, October 18, 1831.

Dear Sir, I am now authorised to say to you that Mr. Lacock had a full knowledge in the winter of 1818, 19 of the confidential letter alluded to (or as he calls it the Johnny Rhea letter) from the highest authority.

On the receipt of your second letter authorising me to do so I made application to Col Watmaugh, who wrote to Mr. Roberts and received a reply not explicit, but, from which the inference was irresi[s]tible that he had a full knowledge of the contents of the letter. he promised to give the Col. a full statement of all the particulars attending it when they met which was expected in a few days. The Col. showed me the letter. I then told him that the information was desired by me for the purpose of communicating it to a gentleman with whom I had conversed on the subject and stated my belief that both Roberts and Lacock had seen the letter, wishing him to write to Mr. Roberts, state my object to him and ask him if he had any objection to my making this use of his letter. The Col. wrote accordingly but had received no answer when I went to Baltimore on the railroad excursion, and he went on to Washington before my return. it was a subject of too much delicacy for me to press and finding no letter from Col Watmaugh determined to wait until Mr. Lacock came to the Baltimore Convention to which he had been elected¹ and I knew he was to be here as a commissioner of a Canal company.

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Hearing of his arrival yesterday I called on him and found him alone. after some time I introduced the subject of the Seminole War the proceedings in Congress about it and the controversy at and between Mr. Calhoun and Crawford and referred to the confidential letter.

1 The Antimasonic National Convention of Sept, 26, 1831.

In the course of the conversation he said he had not seen the letter but that during that session 1818, 19 he had a knowledge of the contents of it in full and of all that had passed in relation to it from the highest authority, conversed freely and repeatedly with Mr. Calhoun on the views taken by the President himself and the Cabinet and the course of proceeding in the Senate on the subject and then remarked, Crawford is right about it. Finding my remarks made in your parlour last winter and those contained in my first letter on this matter fully confirmed I then remarked to him that in 1823 I had stated to you the course understood to have been adopted in the Cabinet that Mr. Crawford had been improperly confused [?] by your friends for the part he was supposed to have taken and that if anyone had taken an unfriendly part towards you it was Mr. Calhoun. I offered to Lacock that Mr. Crawford had given me this information and then stated to him the conversation between us last winter, that for these reasons it was my wish to communicate our conversation to you but that it would not be done without his permission.

Mr Lacock replied that he knew of no reason why everything which took place at that time (1818, 19) should be considered as confidential especially after so much had been published about it, that Mr. Calhoun had written to him on the subject and had his reply in full. he then gave me permission to state our conversation to you which is in substance what is here done. he several times repeated the expression, "yes from the highest authority".

I am much pleased that you are thus able to state the fact of the communication of the contents of your confidential letter to others than the members of Mr Munroes cabinet. it

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did not occur to me to ask Mr. Lecock whether he had seen a copy, it was my impression from the conversation that he had but I cannot say that any expressions of his were intended to carry that idea. I shall see him again and if a proper occasion occurs will ascertain that fact distinctly.

As it was your desire to receive as early information, on this matter as possible it has been given at the earliest time. if in any future interview with Mr. Lacock he should state any thing additional worth mentioning it will be immediately communicated. in the meantime it is my wish that unless it is necessary for your own vindication my name should not be used. A reference to Mr Lacock and his correspondence with Mr Calhoun and if necessary to Mr Roberts will afford ample means of proving all that this letter contains, probably much more. If you wish me to have any more particular conversation with Mr Lacock I will do it, this has been our first conversation on the Seminole war for many years. he spoke about the matter without any feeling, said much about you but nothing personal or harsh, confining his objections to your reelection entirely to political considerations. I am sure he would not decline any information from any impulse of personal hostility to yourself or political attachment to Mr Clay. as to any matter between you and Mr Calhoun he appears under no bias

Yours with esteem